

him, as to the Protestant nations of to-day, the entire devotion of a man's best years to acts of prayer and praise seemed a fatal misuse of the talents given by G-od. He waged open war with the central idea of that mediaeval piety which had founded the monasteries, and was in his day founding the chantries. That idea we have heard expressed by Langland in the words, 'Prayers of a perfect man and penance discreet, is the dearest labour that pleases our lord.' Wycliffe held that there were many labours dearer to G-od. His assertion of the superiority of an active over a devotional life was in that age a daring rebellion. It startled and scandalised churchmen ; for half the Church institutions were based on the assumption that prayer and praise were better than work in the world. It would not be hard to trace almost all his heresies to their root in this attitude of mind towards the acts of conventional piety, which formed the principal part of religion in his day. When another generation had passed, when men had had time to see what were the new ideas which Lollardry had brought into the world, then the indifference of the reformers to devotions hitherto considered all-important, was recognised by orthodox writers as the new monster with which the Church had to wage internecine war.<sup>1</sup> The final victory of that monster brought with it the inevitable disappearance of the monks, of the chantry-priests and the armies of clergy without cure of souls. The fact that there has been no serious movement to re-establish them in England is a-standing proof that the old idea has never recovered ground to any considerable extent.

Of one section of the Church we have as yet said little. The monasteries were, indeed, in no close contact, either of subordination, hostility, or alliance, with the rest of the religious world. The days of their greatness and popularity had gone by. The Princes of the earth no longer rode up to the Abbey door to beg an interview with some brother, renowned through Europe for his wisdom or his virtue. The King of England no longer sent for some saintly abbot, to implore him to take pity on the land and exchange the government of his House for the government of a great diocese. The cloister of

<sup>1</sup> *Waldensis, passim.*